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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

In the Matter of)	
Petition for Waiver Filed by)	CC Docket No. 96-45
)	
Ozark Telephone Company)	AAD 95-62
)	
Concerning the Definition of "Study Area" Contained in the)	
Part 36 Appendix-Glossary of the Commission's Rules)	

To: Chief, Common Carrier Bureau

**REQUEST FOR REMOVAL OF WAIVER CONDITION
CONSISTENT WITH COMMISSION POLICY**

Ozark Telephone Company ("Ozark") submits this request for the removal of the "cap" on the Universal Service Fund ("USF") cost allocation support payments established by the Commission's Order adopted January 16, 1996, with respect to Ozark's study area.¹ The Order authorized the transfer of local exchange facilities consisting of two exchanges serving 1909 access lines into Ozark's newly-created study area. As a condition to the grant of study area waiver, the Order imposed a limitation or "cap" on USF disbursements to the Ozark study area of \$530,480 per annum. Consistent with the overarching Commission policy conclusions now established by the Memorandum Opinion and Order on Reconsideration, released September 9, 1999,² Ozark requests that its individual USF cap be removed as of January 1, 2000.³

¹ Memorandum Opinion and Order, AAD 95-62, 11 FCC Rcd 1815 (1996) ("Order").

² Memorandum Opinion and Order on Reconsideration, AAD 93-93, 95-72, 95-30, 97-21, 97-23, 97-117, 98-44, 98-53, DA 99-1845, released September 9, 1999 ("Cap Removal Order").

³ Although this Request references an effective date of January 1, 2000, Ozark does not waive its right to raise issues in the future with respect to the applicability of the Commission's policy or rules to prior periods beginning May 8, 1997.

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Ozark expects that many other similarly-situated companies will be seeking removal of their individual USF caps consistent with the Bureau's newly articulated policy conclusions. In order to avoid the administrative burden of repeatedly applying its new policy to a multitude of almost identical requests, Ozark respectfully suggests that the Commission simply clarify, on its own motion, its policy by lifting the 57 remaining USF caps.

In the absence of this clarification, Ozark respectfully requests expedited action in light of the consistency of this request with the recent policy conclusions and to accommodate the completion of the USF administration prior to January 1, 2000. In support thereof, Ozark submits the following:

I. Background

On April 21, 1995, Ozark and GTE (together with two other Missouri companies) filed a joint petition for waiver of the frozen study area boundaries. On January 17, 1996, the FCC released its Order authorizing the removal of exchanges from the GTE Missouri study area and allowing Ozark and the other two companies to consolidate their acquired exchanges within their respective Missouri study areas. Ozark was authorized to transfer two exchanges serving 1909 access lines into a newly-created study area subject to the condition that, absent explicit approval from the Bureau, the annual USF support provided to the existing study area would not exceed the estimated post-upgrade amount of \$530,480, specified in the joint petition.⁴ The National Exchange Carrier Association ("NECA") was ordered not to distribute USF payments exceeding the limitation.

⁴ Order at ¶ 7, n.24.

Although Ozark was aware in 1996 that the facilities to be purchased were substandard, and that the Bureau would likely impose a limit on USF recovery, Ozark, nevertheless, fully expected that a rational network cost recovery application would be ultimately resolved consistent with the public interest.⁵ Ozark believed that rational cost recovery would be possible by removal of the limit or the implementation of a new USF plan, under which the reasonable high costs would be addressed. Although the Ozark study area's 2000 USF receipts, based on data forwarded from the Universal Service Administrative Corporation ("USAC") to the Commission on October 1, 1999, will likely be less than the \$530,480 cap imposed in the Order, grant of this request will allow Ozark to proceed in coming months and years with network upgrades with the understanding that the costs incurred in providing advanced services in rural Missouri will be addressed by USF cost recovery.

II. Removal of Ozark's Cap is Consistent with Established Commission Policy

On September 9, 1999, the Commission issued its Cap Removal Order, addressing petitions for waiver and reconsideration of the USF conditions applied to 32 study areas. While the Commission noted its policy of monitoring USF impact on carriers involved in study area changes and capping carriers at some estimate of post-upgrade costs, the Commission correctly concluded that limiting the duration of those caps is appropriate and in the public interest.⁶

⁵ Ozark has completed extensive upgrades throughout its study area since the acquisition. Over the past four years, Ozark has replaced central office switching in both exchanges and has reconfigured the network to upgrade to 100% single party service, and to allow the provision of vertical features such as CLASS and custom calling and equal access to its subscribers. In addition, Ozark has upgraded buried cable and deployed a fiber backbone network. Ozark has invested more than \$5 million in its network over the past four years.

⁶ Cap Removal Order at ¶ 9.

Accordingly, the Commission granted petitioners' requests to lift the individual caps placed on their high cost loop support on a going-forward basis.⁷ As of January 1, 2000, the high cost loop support for the 32 study areas will then be based upon the average cost of all their lines.

The Commission acknowledged that "caps of unlimited duration may hinder petitioners' incentive and ability to extend service to previously unserved areas, as well as to upgrade service to their existing customers."⁸ The Commission also determined that "limiting the petitioners to the high cost loop support estimated in their original petitions, in perpetuity, is not necessary to accomplish the [Commission's] policies . . ." The Commission "concluded that . . . the individual caps placed on the carriers' high cost loop support have served their purpose . . ."⁹ The Commission also recognized correctly that lifting the caps on petitioners' high cost support will increase the affected LECs' incentives and ability to extend service to previously unserved areas and upgrade their networks."¹⁰

Ozark's conditions are effectively identical to those petitioners addressed in the Cap Removal Order. Therefore, removal of Ozark's individual USF cap is both warranted by, and consistent with, the Commission's conclusions and policy enunciated in the Cap Removal Order. Like the petitioners addressed in that order, Ozark purchased exchanges several years ago and, in

⁷ Cap Removal Order at ¶ 10.

⁸ Id.

⁹ Id.

¹⁰ Cap Removal Order at ¶ 10. See also Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service: Promoting Development and Subscribership in Unserved Areas, Including Tribal and Insular Areas, Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, CC Docket No. 96-45, FCC 99-204 (rel. Sept. 3, 1999).

conjunction with its request for study area waiver, provided a reasonable estimate of the costs to upgrade the subject facilities for the provision of basic telephone service to existing and new customers. Continuing to limit Ozark to the high cost loop support estimated in its original petition is not necessary to accomplish the Commission's policies. Further, continued application of the individual cap imposed in January 1996 will hinder Ozark's incentive to continue to invest in advanced services networks and to upgrade existing service, and would jeopardize Ozark's ability to maintain reasonably comparable rates for modern services.

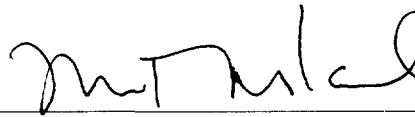
III. Conclusion

Consistent with the Commission's policy established in its Cap Removal Order, Ozark requests that the individual USF cap established by the Commission's Order be removed as of January 1, 2000. Ozark requests that the Commission lift the individual cap placed on its high cost loop support on a going-forward basis so that, as of January 1, 2000, Ozark's high cost loop support payments will be based upon the average cost of all its lines. Adequate USF funding is necessary to allow Ozark to continue to maintain and upgrade its facilities for the provision of universal service to its rural Missouri study area. Expedited grant of this request will serve the public interest by ensuring that Ozark receives adequate universal service funding to recover the

costs of its investment and thereby meet its current and future service requirements.

Respectfully submitted,

Ozark Telephone Company

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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I, Shelley Davis, of Kraskin, Lesse & Cosson, LLP, 2120 L Street, NW, Suite 520, Washington, DC 20037, hereby certify that a copy of the foregoing "Request for Removal of Waiver Condition Consistent with Commission Policy" of Ozark Telephone Company, was served on this 1st day of November, 1999 by hand delivery to the following parties:


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